

THE ARCHÆOLOGY OF THE POTOMAC TIDE-WATER REGION.

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(With Plates xv-xix.)

The U. S. National Museum has undertaken to publish a series of bulletins upon the natural history of the region around Washington. Already the birds and plants have been studied and the results given to the world.

The natural history of any region includes its human fauna, and the series of bulletins under consideration would be incomplete without an account of the peoples that have here resided. Our business in this brief introductory chapter is with the aborigines. And, since it is not possible to confine the inquiry to the ten miles square called the District of Columbia, the Potomac drainage shall be the ground covered. Even this region must be narrowed, for we shall ascend no tributary further than those rapids that mark the limit of tide-water, and mark also the location of the principal cities, such as Georgetown, Fredericksburgh, Richmond, etc.

In time, our limit shall be the end of the first half of the seventeenth century on the hither side, but the other limit shall be pushed far enough back to admit all of those geological inquiries that have become involved with the history of man.

It is possible to commence our study at either limit, taking up, first, either the geology of what is called the Columbian period or studying the last Indian tribes that left this arena just after the settlement of the royalists in Virginia and the Catholics in Maryland. For the purposes of elimination the latter plan will be adopted.

The tribes of Indians along the Potomac tide-water region have been well studied by Mr. James Mooney, and his map, which is here produced (see Plate xv), shows their locations and boundaries.

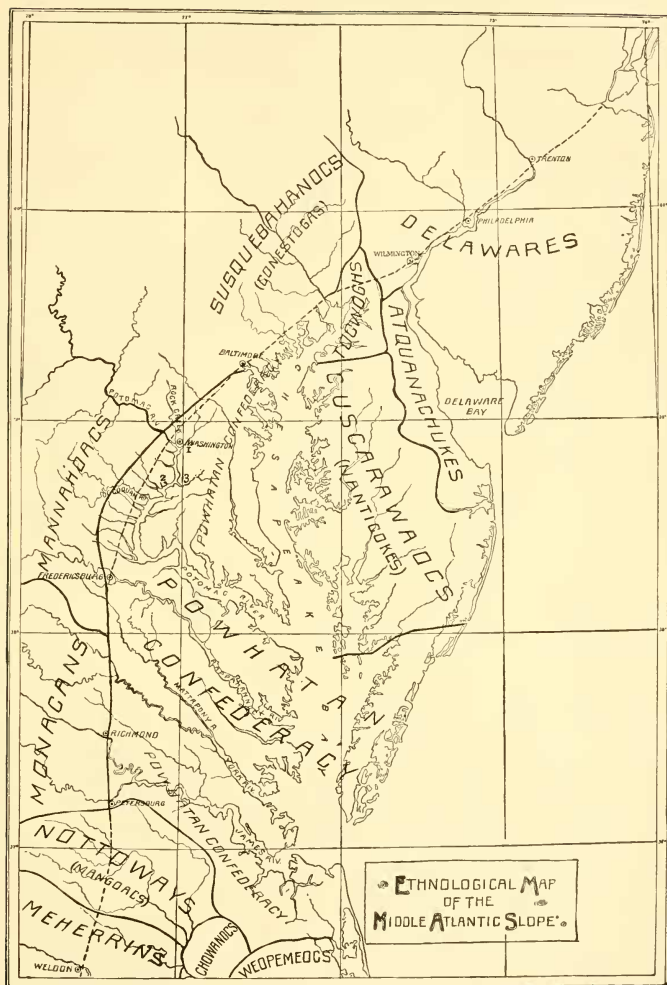
The central portion of the area was the home of the Powhatan confederacy, belonging to the great Algonkin stock, which rivaled in extent the domain of Charles the Sixth. On the north and the south they were hard pressed by members of the Iroquoian stock, while on the

west and just above the line of cascades wandered the Mannahoacs and Monacans, of unknown stock, but for many reasons believed to belong to the Dakotans.

Only a few years after the white occupation of the Potomac Valley did the Indians remain. Save such miserable remnant as are now to be seen at Pamunkey, in Virginia, they were driven off by the early settlers, leaving but two foot-prints—the shell-heaps and the dwelling sites. The Chesapeake Bay is salt water and is the home of the oyster, where the supply of this valuable food product is still abundant. The brackish water of sufficient saltness to suit the oyster extends up the Potomac River to within 50 miles of Washington. Consequently, from the point named to the mouth of the river, wherever there was a cove adapted to the abundant growth of the oyster, there camped the Indians and left shell-heaps, which in some places are of enormous extent. It is fortunate that we have among our scientific explorers in Washington Dr. Elmer Reynolds, who has lost no opportunity in examining the Potomac shell-heaps. A map of a portion of the Potomac, prepared by Dr. Reynolds to show the frequency of the shell-heaps along those portions of the river favorable to the growth of the oyster, is here given.



In the fresh-water portion of the lower Chesapeake drainage—that is, in the region between salt water and the cataracts—stone implements are found in the greatest profusion. It is easy to account for this, when it is remembered that the whole country hereabouts furnished abundant natural food supply. All the old local historians go into ecstasies over the shad, herring, sturgeon, wild duck, turkey, and deer, not to mention the great variety of small game, grain, fruit, and maize. To one accustomed to exploration among the mounds of the Ohio Valley or in the West Indies the stone implements are in appearance disappointing. While here and there polished axes are found, the polished implement is the exception, not the rule, especially on higher ground.



1. Nacochtank (Anacostia).

2. Tauxenent (Mt. Vernon).

3. Moyaones.

